

# What's Next

The County Planning and Building Department has established a web page for a rural water conservation program. The web page has links to local and state agency water conservation tips, landscaping recommendations and all of the technical reports prepared for the basin since 2002.

Please go to:  
<http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/planning/commguidelines/PRgroundwater.htm>

Two **upcoming community meetings** are scheduled to discuss what can be done and what is being done to deal with the groundwater situation:

- Creston School**  
5105 O'Donovan Rd  
Wednesday, June 8  
6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
- Vina Robles Winery**  
3700 Mill Road  
Wednesday, June 15  
6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Please visit the web site and come to one of the meetings to learn more about these groundwater basin issues.

# Well Permits

The entire population of the rural North County gets its water from groundwater wells. What that means is that there are a lot of “straws” in the same glass; in fact, there are over 8,000 wells in the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. How do we know this? Because the Public Health Department, Division of Environmental Health, issues a permit for each one of them. Environmental Health records such information as total well depth, depth of static water level, estimated yield in gallons per minute, and the GPS coordinates.

Now, Environmental Health is moving into the 21st century with a program to digitize all of those thousands of permits and the data they carry. The public can be assured that individual Well Completion Reports will remain confidential, and only the data will be used for government studies and reports.

Other changes are occurring too. Starting June 30, 2011, all community and non-community public water systems (15 or more connections) will have to meter the water that is pumped from their wells, record that information and report it yearly to the County. This is one of the ways the County is improving its information on rural water demand and its knowledge of the groundwater basin.

Environmental Health will be sending out more information on both the water system and individual well programs in the near future. In the meantime, please consider how you can use this precious groundwater resource more efficiently.

# San Luis Obispo County

County Departments of Planning and Building, Public Works and Public Health



## Contacts

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## Community Meetings

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## North County's Water Source

THANK YOU for taking the time to read this first newsletter about the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. The basin covers approximately 800 square miles (see Figure 1) and is the primary, and in many places the only, source of water available to property owners throughout the North County. This newsletter, which is sent to all rural property owners overlying the basin, describes the problems in the basin, explains what residents can do about them, and outlines steps the County is taking.

The County Board of Supervisors, after a four-year study, has concluded that groundwater levels are dropping throughout the basin (see Figure 2 below). The Board has also concluded that pumping of groundwater from the basin has reached or is quickly approaching the basin's “perennial yield.” Once the perennial yield of a groundwater basin is reached, additional pumping beyond that amount will result in lowering groundwater levels. You may have already experienced this problem with your own well.

Cities such as Paso Robles and Atascadero and the community of Templeton have very successful water conservation programs in place. These communities have also made a tremendous investment to bring water from Lake Nacimiento into the basin area. The wine and vineyard industry has also made substantial and successful efforts to use water more efficiently. The Board of Supervisors has directed County staff to expand water conservation efforts to rural residential water users. This newsletter is the first step in that rural water conservation program.

Please go to the Planning and Building Department's website, [www.sloplanning.org](http://www.sloplanning.org), and click on the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin for more information. The web site will be the County's primary way to communicate with property owners.

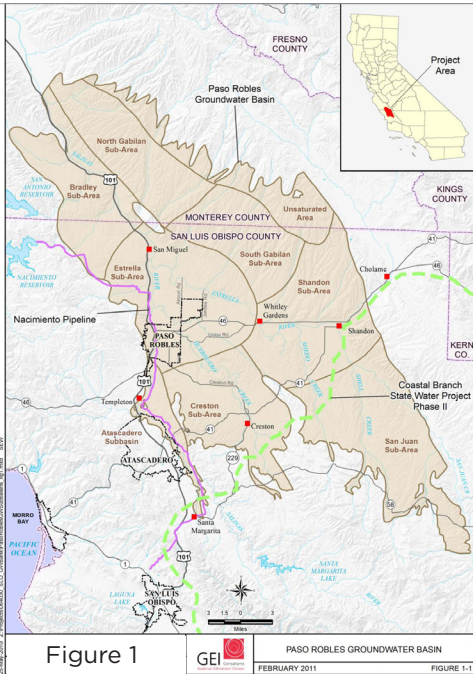


Figure 1 PASO ROBLES GROUNDWATER BASIN  
GEI FEBRUARY 2011 FIGURE 1-1

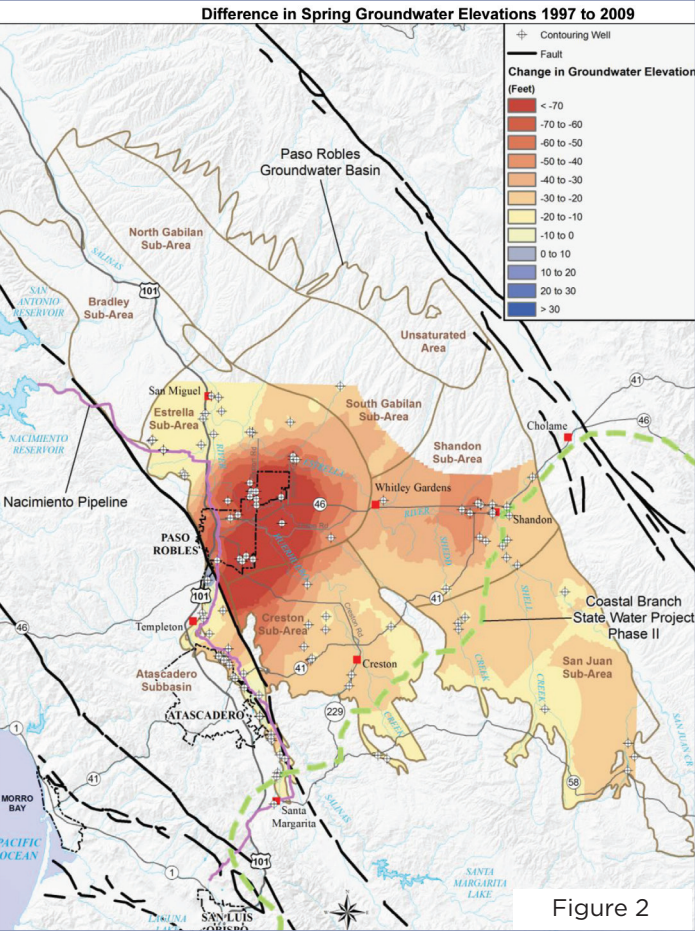


Figure 2

Groundwater Condition: **CRITICAL**



## Water Conservation in the Rural North County

Water conservation can be divided into indoor and outdoor water conservation. It's easy to identify the water-using plumbing fixtures and appliances in your house and see if you're using that water efficiently. Consider the following recommendations:

### Indoor Water Conservation Recommendations

- Replace your high water-using toilet with a High Efficiency Toilet (1.28 or fewer gallons per flush)
- Change showerheads from 5 or 2.5 gallons per minute (gpm) to 1.5 gpm
- When it's time to buy a washing machine, consider a front loading model
- When it's time to buy a dishwasher, consider a high efficiency model
- Install an instant hot water or hot water circulation system

Check out the independent performance testing that was done on hundreds of toilets! Look up the brand and model you're interested in or find the most efficient and best-flushing toilets on the market. See <http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/planning/commguidelines/PRgroundwater.htm> for more information.

North County, with its hot dry summers, sees a majority of water use outdoors. Approximately 65% of water use is outdoors, with most of that occurring in the summer. Outdoor water conservation focuses on landscaping and other irrigation needs.



### Go Native!

After reviewing the GardenSoft web site, [www.gardensoft.com](http://www.gardensoft.com), and choosing the native plants that are right for your area and yard, remember to visit the many excellent sources for native plants in the county. See [www.sloplanning.org](http://www.sloplanning.org) for examples of websites.

### Metering Your Water Well

If you are embarking on a water conservation program, it's important to have a starting point from which to measure your progress. A flow meter is often used to record water use. If you do not currently meter the amount of water produced from your well, please seriously consider installing such a meter. See [www.sloplanning.org](http://www.sloplanning.org) for examples of businesses that deal with this device.

### Consider using the following outdoor water conservation measures and devices:

- Low water-using landscapes, including native or drought-tolerant plants, with drip irrigation
- Limit areas of turf, and replace turf with low water- using plantings
- Smart irrigation controllers
- Grey water for irrigation
- Low Impact Development (LID) measures to increase groundwater recharge
- Cisterns/rainwater collection

### You can also save water by following these common-sense outdoor irrigation tips:

- Water your landscape no more than three times per week
- Irrigate in the early morning hours
- Limit irrigation run times
- On steep slopes, use shorter run times to eliminate runoff
- Adjust irrigation to eliminate watering sidewalks and driveways
- Check your system regularly for broken heads, emitters and drip lines
- Irrigate only when your lawn and plants need water
- Use a shutoff valve or timer when hand-watering with a hose
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean sidewalks and driveways

Remember, proper landscape maintenance will reduce water use (e.g., using mulch).

Visit us online at:  
[www.sloplanning.org](http://www.sloplanning.org)

### GardenSoft Program (Coming Soon!)

The County is pleased to join the cities and communities in establishing a GardenSoft program for the county. GardenSoft.com is a web site that will feature a variety of plant choices and irrigation and maintenance practices that are appropriate for different areas of the county. This website will be invaluable to North County residents as they consider switching to more water-efficient landscaping. Go to [www.gardensoft.com](http://www.gardensoft.com).

## The State of the Groundwater Basin and What the County is Doing About It

The Board of Supervisors recently reviewed and adopted the conclusions and recommendations of a Resource Capacity Study (RCS) of the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. Using information from several technical reports prepared about the basin, the RCS concluded that basin groundwater levels have fallen extensively over a long period of time.

Since we know that the basin is starting to decline, some actions are needed to stop the falling groundwater levels. The California Constitution, however, gives every landowner whose property is over the basin (overlyers) the right to use as much water as needed, as long as the water is put to a "reasonable and beneficial use." The County does not regulate how much and where groundwater is used.

Groundwater basins can go through "adjudication." This happens when one or more overlyers file a lawsuit against the other users of the basin. In our county, the Los Osos and Santa Maria Groundwater basins are in adjudication. The Santa Maria case has gone on for more than 12 years and has cost more than \$11 million.

The County can only use the authority it has to deal with groundwater problems. That authority generally only applies to new development, not existing homes and businesses. The County can require new development to offset the amount of groundwater it will use. Also, since there are thousands of undeveloped lots in the basin that could add to future water demand, the County could preclude the creation of new lots. Another measure the County could take is to limit the number of new dwelling units that could be built in the basin each year.

The County Board of Supervisors has directed County staff to prepare ordinances that include the measures mentioned above. The County Planning and Building Department, together with other County departments, will work on these ordinances in the coming months. We will make available drafts of these ordinances on our web page: [www.slocounty.ca.gov/planning/commguidelines/](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/planning/commguidelines/) / [PRgroundwater.htm](http://PRgroundwater.htm)

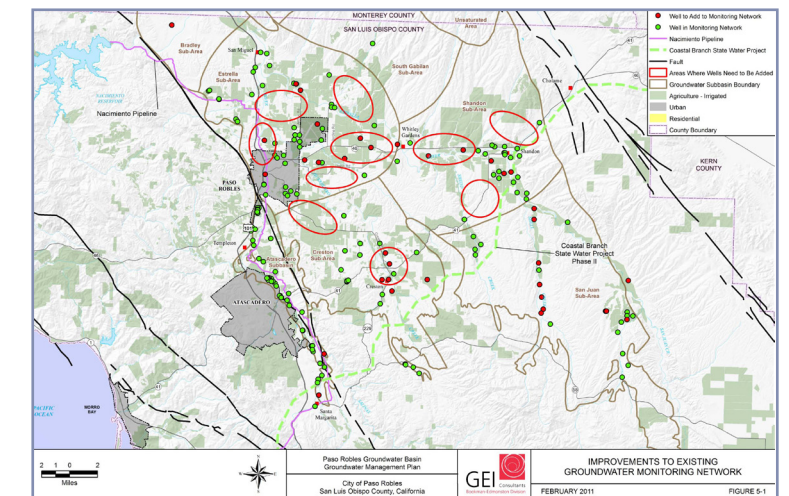
## Groundwater Monitoring Wells

One of the problems with assessing the condition of a groundwater basin is the fact that the water cannot be seen. It's deep underground. The key to understanding groundwater levels in a basin is to have a comprehensive network of monitoring wells throughout the basin.

There are gaps in the water well monitoring network which, if filled, would improve our ability to fully understand the state of the groundwater conditions. Fortunately, many property owners have volunteered to participate in the County's water well measuring program.

Water level measurements are necessary in order to create groundwater elevation contour maps like the one on Page 1 of this newsletter, and are used for important groundwater management efforts. We know from these measurements that groundwater levels in parts of the basin have dropped anywhere from 10 feet to more than 90 feet from 1996-2008.

The map below shows the general location of the monitoring well network. The red circles indicate areas where there are gaps in the data. If you own a well in any of those areas and would like to help keep an eye on water levels in the groundwater basin, please contact Syllas Cranor at [scrantor@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:scrantor@co.slo.ca.us) to discuss adding your well to the County's program.



## A First Line of Defense: the Groundwater Management Plan

As we all know, the issues surrounding water are often very controversial. Mark Twain may have said it best: "Whiskey is for drinking; water is for fighting over." But, there are many folks in North County who are trying to disprove the old adage.

In 2010/2011, the City of Paso Robles and the County led a voluntary effort along with other basin stakeholders to prepare a groundwater management plan (GMP) for the Paso Robles Groundwater Basin. The GMP addresses groundwater conditions, identifies local and basin-wide groundwater issues, and outlines measures to protect groundwater within the basin. Basin Management Objectives have been prepared for each subarea of the basin. In general, maintaining or stabilizing groundwater levels was identified as the highest priority in every subarea.

You can find the GMP at [www.SLOCountyWater.org](http://www.SLOCountyWater.org) or at [www.sloplanning.org](http://www.sloplanning.org). A steering committee has been formed to help implement the GMP, and property owners are encouraged to participate in these efforts. To sign up to receive email updates and announcements regarding these efforts, please contact Syllas Cranor at [scrantor@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:scrantor@co.slo.ca.us).